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UNCLAS PRAGUE 001871

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

FOR EUR HCONLEY AND R TISGITT

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: RFE/RL GETS "NEW LEASE" ON LIFE IN PRAGUE

1. (U) Sensitive But Unclassified - Not for Internet Distribution.

2. (SBU) The Czech cabinet announced on December 22 the approval of a new lease for Prague-based Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), which will extend their tenure in their current headquarters building until December 31, 2007. The current five-year lease was due to expire at the end of this month, but GOCR officials had repeatedly assured us that the lease would be extended to cover the USG projected schedule of time necessary to move the radios to a safer location in Prague. Due to a technical change in Czech law, a new lease was approved, rather than an extension of the current lease, but the conditions of the agreement remain the same. The government's decision was announced with little fanfare, and leading news outlets carried straightforward accounts noting that the lease was extended while the search for an alternate location remains ongoing.

3. (SBU) Otherwise, the search for a new location remains on track, with four companies submitting bids on November 23 to build a new headquarters for approximately 600 employees of the radios. A multi-disciplinary team in Washington, with representatives from State OBO and the Broadcasting Board of Governors, is currently evaluating the bids, with a final decision planned for early in 2005. Once a site is selected, the Embassy and Czech officials have pledged to use best efforts to fast-track the permitting process (an unusually tedious and bureaucratic process in this country that can easily take up to 12 months). With this lease extension, progress on the RFE/RL relocation once again takes a giant step forward, to the satisfaction of all parties concerned.

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